

Statement of Representative Ed Royce
Chairman, Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation
"9/11: Five years later – Gauging Islamist Terrorism"
September 7, 2006

Monday, September 11, 2006, marks the five-year anniversary of the terrorist attacks launched by Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, which killed over 3,000 U.S. citizens. On this day, Americans will appropriately remember their fallen countrymen. Inevitably, the question will be asked, "Are we safer?" Yes, we are, but the unfortunate reality is that the Islamist terrorist threat to our country will endure, perhaps for decades. Today's hearing is meant to gauge progress in the struggle against Islamist terrorism, with a view toward sharpening policy and educating the American public about this threat.

As President Bush stated this week, and as this Subcommittee has examined, al-Qaeda since 9/11 --under attack by the U.S. and others-- has had to drastically reconfigure. Recently, British authorities disrupted a plot to simultaneously explode up to ten commercial airliners over the Atlantic Ocean, en route to the United States. Although the plot appears to involve several "homegrown" British *ihadists* of Pakistani descent, connections to Pakistan may suggest firmer command and control by "al-Qaeda central" than counterterrorism officials previously understood. As summed up recently by a top British official, the threat from Islamist terrorists "is real, it's here, it's deadly and it's enduring."

This summer offered a stark reminder of state-sponsored terrorism, as Iran-backed Hezbollah rained rockets on Israel. I was in Haifa during the attacks and saw the damage. These rockets can only be fired indiscriminately and are used to terrorize civilians. Hezbollah is formidable. Prime Minister Olmert suggested to me that the press revelations of intelligence and security methods have hampered their counter-terrorism efforts.

Just as the terrorists have evolved, we as a government and society must evolve too. Judge Richard Posner wrote last month, "to the extent that our laws do handicap us in fighting terrorists, it is one more sign that we do not take the threat of terrorism seriously enough to be willing to reexamine a commitment to a *rather extravagant* conception of civil liberties that was formed in a different and safer era." The overreaction to the Administration's "terrorist surveillance program," which aims to intercept al-Qaeda communications, tells me that Judge Posner is on the mark. The desperate need today is to find out who the terrorists are, and we shouldn't shy away from doing so aggressively.

We should learn a few lessons from others who have extensive experience in dealing with terrorism on their soil. One way to do this would be to restart the debate over the creation of a domestic intelligence service without police powers, similar to the British MI5. Criminal prosecution and intelligence collection are vastly different tasks, and to

date, several have given the FBI poor marks on intelligence collection. We wouldn't need to consider such steps if the threat weren't all too deadly and enduring.

The challenge in fact is grave. Looking across the map, Islamists have taken control of large swaths of territory in Somalia, and other parts of Africa remain susceptible to terrorist exploitation; our dependence upon Middle East oil funds schools of hate; Iraq's future is at a crossroads; Iran is aggressively pursuing nuclear weapons; Afghanistan is showing worrying signs of regression; in the world's largest Muslim nation, Indonesia, a once tolerant Islam is being radicalized; in Europe, a large, mobile, and educated Muslim population includes some who are attracted to terrorism, and who hold passports that do not require a visa to enter the United States; in the tri-border area of South America, Hezbollah raises funds; the Caucasus, southern Thailand... Almost nowhere is immune to radical Islamist thought, and all parts of this chessboard are equally urgent. Complacency is another enemy we face, including here at home, where things as elementary as border security are woefully neglected, as the Subcommittee heard in July field hearings.

Moving forward, we won't have lasting success against Islamist terrorism until we're able to counter al-Qaeda's ideological appeal. Given the large number of people around the world already sympathetic to Osama bin Laden, this will be a monumental effort. But with proliferating access to WMD knowledge and material, none more important. All means of national power must be harnessed for this effort.

There is a tendency of some to ascribe most every terrorist threat to our nation. Some would have you believe that there would be no terrorism were it not for supposed shortcomings of Administration policy. They fail to note that the forces driving terrorism --Islamic radicalism-- have been long in the making. Indeed, our nation was attacked several times before 9/11. [Oddly enough, the view that it can all be laid upon the Administration mirrors the terrorist rhetoric against the U.S.] Constructive criticism is good, but the bottom line is that we haven't been hit since 9/11, despite facing a determined and resourceful enemy. Homeland and national security policies, while not perfect, deserve credit.